

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 24 October 2012.

PRESENT: Mr R F Manning (Chairman), Mr B R Cope, Mr G Cowan, Mrs T Dean, Mrs S V Hohler, Mr P J Homewood, Mr R J Lees and Mr J E Scholes

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVE: Mr Stephen Bryan representing the Archdiocese of Southwark

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M J Whiting (Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Blincow (Research and Development Manager), Mrs S Rogers (Director of Education, Quality and Standards), Mr P Sass (Head of Democratic Services) and Mrs A Taylor (Research Officer to Scrutiny Committee)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

7. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2012 *(Item A4)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2012 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

8. Key Stage 2 Attainment *(Item B1)*

- (1) Mrs Rogers, Director of Education, Quality and Standards introduced the item and explained that the Key Stage 2 (KS2) Attainment select committee had looked at the whole remit for KS2 and how the factors affecting KS2 performance could be addressed. This had resulted in a significant report challenging the service to improve its performance at KS2 and to explore the issues highlighted by the select committee.
- (2) The service had been actively discussing school's performance with them through the Kent Challenge scheme. From the 2012 results KS2 (level 4 English and Maths combined) had gone up to 78% this year, the fastest progress that Kent had seen in terms of achieving national benchmark. Of the 123 schools that were targeted for Kent Challenge in 2010 only 30 schools achieved floor standard, last year this rose to 70 schools, and this year 109 of the 123 schools were above the floor standard. This was a significant improvement in the number of schools achieving the floor standard in English and Maths at Key Stage 2 and there was an expectation of further improvement.
- (3) Kent County Council (KCC) was closing the gap with its statistical neighbours in relation to attainment; the aim was to be in line if not above the other shire authorities in 2013.

- (4) Mr Whiting expressed his congratulations to the team, they had taken on the various aspects of the select committee report and great improvements were being made.
- (5) Members commended the directorate on the improvements made in KS2. It was important to raise the attainment levels in the deprived wards, peer pressure and continued mentoring and support for headteachers and schools staff was essential.
- (6) Members raised the following questions and received the following answers:
- a. Referring to page 10 of the agenda papers '*we expect to spend £3.5million by next March*', a Member asked for an explanation of what the money would be spent on. Mrs Rogers explained that funding had been received from the funding forum to accelerate improvement in schools in collaboratives. KCC was being cautious about releasing the money as it was vital that it made a real difference in schools. Best practice was being shared by ensuring that outstanding schools were part of the collaborations.
 - b. Is any allowance made for children and their parents coming into Kent who did not have English as their first language? Mrs Rogers explained that many schools in Kent had a significant number of children for whom English was not their first language. KCC and the voluntary sector worked hard with schools to ensure there was provision to support these children and their families. However, it was important to note that the breakdown of figures showed that the vulnerable groups that were poorest performing in Kent were not the English as an additional language groups, they were often the free school meal, white indigenous groups, predominantly boys. It was vital to ensure that the background of a child did not determine their future and everyone needed to work together to do this. Mr Whiting explained that the pupil premium funding formula had recently been consulted on and there was a hope that additional funding would be received for children with English as an additional language.
 - c. Referring to the need to target the vulnerable groups within schools there was no differentiation within the action plan between the different groups in the schools with additional problems. There was no target on gender which was important because of the traditional underperformance of boys. Regarding funding; was there any feeling that the conversion to academies had contributed to the increase in achievement in some of the schools. Mrs Rogers explained that whilst the improvement in Kent had been good, no-one was being complacent. A report setting out a breakdown of all the vulnerable groups and gender would be submitted to the Education Cabinet Committee in November.
 - d. Mr Whiting explained that the Education Cabinet Committee received update reports on the progress of the service but the Scrutiny Committee was welcome to look into any relevant issues if necessary.
 - e. Mrs Rogers explained that feedback received confirmed that headteachers were grateful for the challenge KCC was giving them and that the Kent

Challenge approach was working. Officers were consistently taking headteachers out to other areas, often in London, with a similar school makeup to show what could be achieved.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee

- (7) Thank Mr Whiting and Mrs Rogers for attending the meeting and for answering Members' questions
- (8) Note and commend the improvement in KS2 standards in 2012.

9. Student Journey

(Item B2)

- (1) Mr Blincow introduced the report and explained that the background to the select committee was around the challenges that young people faced when they moved into employment. The legislation and policy surrounding the issues contained within the select committee report was changing quickly and this was important to note.
- (2) Mr Lees was a member of the select committee and explained that it was important to the select committee that the recommendations were both practical and achievable, it was encouraging to see the progress that had been made and that things were working. Most of the amber areas in the action plan concerned the legislative changes that had been referred to previously.
- (3) The Chairman invited the graduates on Kent County Council's graduate programme to the table to offer their views on the subject. There was a question on the graduate entry routes and opportunities. Mr Blincow explained that the challenge was to raise the standard of the skills of all young people to enable them to find the correct pathway to enter employment.
- (4) Kent County Council was working with companies to encourage valuable work experience and offer alternative qualifications to encourage young people who otherwise might be disengaged from the education process to participate. Research showed that having a degree or further qualification enhanced young people's chances of employment. Portfolios were being developed to record young people's skills and achievements not only in school but outside of school.
- (5) A number of action points within the plan were waiting for further information and letters to be written to the Secretary of State. Members queried the location of the Kent Choices4u website. Mr Blincow explained that consultations which were received were being responded to which had delayed the Secretary of State's letter. Regarding the website it had been hoped that Kent Choices4u would remain as a stand-alone website but it had been incorporated into the kent.gov website.
- (6) Concerns were raised about careers education in schools, this was vitally important to help young people find what they enjoyed and what they were good at. Young people needed to be made aware of the opportunities for employment. There was a duty on schools to secure appropriate independent careers guidance for 14-16year olds, however there was no additional funding for this and

next year this duty was to be extended to 19 year olds and year 8 secondary schools. The council was working with schools to support them on this duty which was a challenge for schools.

- (7) Following an invitation from the Chairman the Kent Graduates explained to members their experiences of careers advice in their own schools.
- (8) Further investigation would be carried out in relation to the location of the KentChoices4u website and this information would be reported back to Members.

POST MEETING NOTE: An email from the Chairman of the Select Committee was circulated to Scrutiny Committee Members 29 November 2012.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee:

- (9) Thank Mr Whiting, Mr Blincow and the Kent Graduates (Chris Beale, Tim Middleton, Sam Newing, Matthew Southern and Keturah Watts) for attending the meeting and answering Members' questions.
- (10) Endorse the Student Journey Action Plan
- (11) Recognise the legislative and policy changes made that impact on the Student Journey Select Committee recommendations.